

Members

Sen. Murray Clark, Chairperson
Sen. Robert Meeks
Sen. Ron Alting
Sen. Billie Breaux
Sen. Connie Sipes
Sen. Frank Mrvan
Rep. Gregory Porter
Rep. Richard Bodiker
Rep. Clyde Kersey
Rep. Robert Behning
Rep. Robert Hoffman
Rep. Phyllis Pond



INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION ISSUES

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MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date:	September 15, 1999
Meeting Time:	1:00 P.M.
Meeting Place:	State House, 200 W. Washington St., Senate Chambers
Meeting City:	Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number:	3

Members Present: Sen. Murray Clark, Chairperson; Sen. Robert Meeks; Sen. Ron Alting; Sen. Billie Breaux; Sen. Frank Mrvan; Rep. Richard Bodiker; Rep. Clyde Kersey; Rep. Robert Behning; Rep. Robert Hoffman; Rep. Phyllis Pond.

Members Absent: Sen. Connie Sipes; Rep. Gregory Porter.

Senator Murray Clark, Chairperson, called the meeting to order. He stated that the previous meeting emphasized school safety and this meeting will emphasize the subject of reading. Chairman Clark noted that during the 1999 session he had introduced a bill concerning the undergraduate training of teachers in reading. The bill passed out of the Senate Education Committee, but Senator Clark held the bill for more discussion such as will occur at this meeting.

Several persons addressed the committee and made comments as follows:

¹ Exhibits and other materials referenced in these minutes can be inspected and copied in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House in Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, 200 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for copies. These minutes are also available on the Internet at the General Assembly homepage. The URL address of the General Assembly homepage is <http://www.ai.org/legislative/>. No fee is charged for viewing, downloading, or printing minutes from the Internet.

Terry Spradlin, Legislative Liaison, Indiana Department of Education (DOE) -

Reading and literacy have been top legislative issues of the department for the last several years. Mr. Spradlin distributed a packet of information labeled "A Presentation on Reading Progress in Indiana". (Exhibit A)

Dr. Mary Andis, Language Arts Consultant, DOE continued the department's presentation with a discussion of how children learn to read and what national research says on the subject. Twenty to forty percent of children are at risk of having reading difficulties, yet "every child reading" is an attainable goal. To attain this goal, "start early, finish strong" is a key. School-wide reading programs are important. Schools and families must value reading. High quality reading instruction is needed. Teachers need ongoing professional development, and comprehension, reading, and writing must be taught together.

The annual December DOE conference this year will focus on reading.

Dorothy Winchester, Associate Director, Program Development, DOE, described where Indiana is today in reading performance. By grade 3, Indiana students do well with 69% reaching mastery. But decline occurs as skills shift from learning to read to reading to learn. There are slight declines in comprehension skills in grades 6 and 8, and more of a drop by grade 10 when sophisticated reading with higher levels of comprehension is required.

Much interstate comparative data for Indiana is dated (1994 results) because participation in the national reading assessment (NAEP) tests has been optional for school corporations and most have chosen not to participate. However, recent legislation allows DOE to require schools to participate in this testing program.

Dr. Earlene Holland, Associate Director, Program Development, DOE, discussed various Indiana initiatives that help children learn to read, including the Remediation and Preventive-Remediation Grant Program, 1 Step Up (Educate Indiana), Library Materials Grant, Early Intervention Grant Program, and Title 1 Instruction. Details of these programs are contained in the DOE handout (Exhibit A).

The following recommendations were made to the Committee:

- (1) There is a need at the state level for more information from the schools.
- (2) Expectations from students and teachers need to be made clear.
- (3) The community needs to get involved to support reading education.
- (4) Reading wars (phonics vs. whole language) should end in favor of a balanced approach.
- (5) A system of evaluation and accountability is needed that allows local and state decision making.

Dr. Roger Farr, Executive Director, Indiana University Center for Innovation in

Assessment, described the first grade reading assessment that the administration has recently initiated and distributed written materials to the Committee (Exhibit B):

- (1) Assessment is made in grade 1. Assessment needs to come early; grade 3 is too late.
- (2) Each child is assessed four times grade 1. Four assessments are necessary because of the significant amount of change in a child's reading progress that occurs during that year.
- (3) The assessment includes phonics, beginning reading skills, comprehension, and application of phonics and beginning reading skills.
- (4) The assessment is not an instructional program, but gives teachers data about where children are in reading skills. Teachers badly need this information. This test data will

provide a basis for a variety of programs.

(5) Participation in the program by school corporations is voluntary.

(6) This year is being spent in development and preparation for the first year of testing (2000-2001 school year). There will be opportunity for public input in the development of the assessment. Next week a prototype of the assessment will be administered in Wayne Township, Marion County.

We need to know what reading and literacy comprehension really are. There is more to reading than decoding and letter recognition. Comprehension is the major problem in the US; we do well with decoding, but our kids do not think well when they read.

There is potential to do an assessment in kindergarten and also in grade 2. The test is very inexpensive. If the test is given in kindergarten, there will be a need for special training for some kindergarten teachers to see reading deficiencies.

Jack W. Humphrey, Only Reading Makes It Real, a retired reading specialist who works with Lilly Endowment and the University of Evansville, made the following points:

(1) Reading should be included on the "report card" that schools make to the public.

(2) The endorsement of reading specialist on a teacher's license should not have been abolished.

(3) The time spent on reading in schools has been decreased. This time must be protected, especially in the middle schools.

(4) Concerning school libraries, the amounts spent per student for school libraries are too low. Performance based accreditation (PBA) should look at the collections and circulations of school libraries. There is no excuse not to computerize school libraries.

(5) The state level program and position of "Reading Supervisor" has been abolished. This had been a major, federally funded program, and these people and resources are needed today.

Larry Smith, Chairman, Elementary Education Department, Ball State University,

described the three necessary ingredients to teach students to read: a strong school principal, knowledgeable teachers, and teachers who are intentional (i.e., who believe "this child will read") He recommended a book entitled "No Excuses".

A balanced method of teaching reading is not phonics vs. whole language but a balance between decoding, comprehension, and other elements. The Ball State faculty uses an eclectic, "middle-of-the-road approach to teaching teachers of reading. There are 2,000 elementary education students at Ball State.

Dean Don Warren, School of Education, Indiana University (IU), discussed recent activities at IU in regards to the reading problem in Indiana. Collaborative activities include regional fact finding meetings, surveys to determine what programs seem to be most effective, statewide meetings with partnership school superintendents, and discussions among the reading faculty. We know that there are a variety of concerns and approaches throughout the state, and IU is looking at how to respond appropriately.

Findings are that: (1) a variety of instructional programs are used throughout the state so that beginning teachers should have general preparation that can adapt to whatever instructional program is used in the school that employs the teacher; and (2) for continuing education of licensed teachers, instruction should be geared to whatever program is used in the school where the teacher teaches reading.

In response to a question concerning IU being regarded as central in the controversy about the whole language approach to reading, Dean Warren responded that IU offers

twenty-five courses in reading methods; the whole language text is used in two of these sections and is not the exclusive text for these sections. The nation's leading whole language expert is on the faculty, and the school is proud of this expert, but there are others on the faculty with different viewpoints.

Chairman Clark stated that the goal is that beginning teachers should go into a classroom with a whole toolbox of strategies to teach reading. Last session, some of these teachers testified that they did not feel prepared to teach reading. Some schools have had to retrain their teachers at considerable expense to the school.

Professor Carol Nelson, IU, Coordinator of Elementary Methods of Education, stated that when she accepted this position eight years ago, there were some complaints that students did not have a wide range of preparation for teaching reading. Now fifteen basic concepts are taught by all instructors, there is a balanced approach in use that includes phonics, and a list of language education competencies is being developed.

IU started a program last week to interview most teachers in the state to find out problem areas they experience. The School of Education is also working with schools to find out how well IU student teachers are prepared to teach reading, including teaching slow readers. IU needs to get its students up to speed on a variety of early intervention programs.

J.D. Hollingsworth, Scottish Rite, described a learning center program for children with learning disabilities established by the Scottish Rite with a significant financial commitment. The goal is to have 55 of these centers in the US. Today there are 14 centers, including one in Indianapolis. South Bend and Fort Wayne are opening, and Evansville and Terre Haute centers are projected. These centers use the Gillingham approach, a one-on-one 50 hour method with a high success rate. Twelve children participate at one time; 140 are on the wait list; a student must fail reading for 2 years and be diagnosed as dyslexic to be eligible for admission to the program. The biggest frustration is that there is a lot of demand for the program that cannot be met.

Diane Badgley, parent from Richmond, Indiana, stated that reading is critical to academic and social success. She described the six year path to bring her child to literacy. Ultimately, a private course taught her child to break words into sounds, and brought his reading to grade level in six months. He continues to remain at grade level. All Indiana children who need this instruction should have this opportunity.

Peggy Schafir, parent from Richmond, Indiana, described her painful experience in teaching her child to read. The child had severe dyslexia and lacked phonemic awareness. A private, intensive program in Nashville, TN, was the ultimate solution. The child now reads at grade level while occasionally revisiting the Nashville program. Waiting until the child reached grade 4 was late and took vast resources; she should have started earlier. Reading is complex and there is a need to take action at a young age. Every child should have the attention that her child has received.

Sharon Barnett, School Board Member, Washington Township, Marion County, testified that teachers hired by Washington Township in the last 15 years have not been adequately prepared by higher education institutions to teach reading. The Township has had to implement its own training program for these teachers.

An instructional program named "Direct Approach" is in use with great success in one elementary school in the system. Materials were distributed with information about this program and its successes (Exhibit C). The program gives early success with decoding

and is even useful for children having English as a second language.

Kathy Alfke, elementary teacher, Indianapolis Public Schools, remarked that she is finding her students increasingly weaker in reading skills and that teachers are increasingly frustrated and feel deficient in teaching ability. She has a reading endorsement on her license and a Masters degree with training in whole language, but believes that there is a need for phonics. Ms. Alfke provides a teacher phonics training program that has trained several hundred teachers, including teachers in Washington Township, in the last four years.

Amy Cook Lurvey, COVOH, discussed the new federal special education law (IDEA 97) which moves special education (SE) students toward general education (GE) and requires the same assessment of SE students as GE students receive. The reality is that an estimated 69% of SE students are of average or above average intelligence. Over 50% of the SE students in Indiana have learning disabilities (LD). Assessment scores printed in the newspapers do not include SE results, so we do not have a true picture.

Concerning the graduation examination, the percentage of students who are below standard are 19.6% in GE, 78.6% in LD, and 75% in SE without LD. Graduation rates are 88% GE, 50% LD, and 53% SE without LD. Dropout rates are 12% GE, 50% LD, and 47% SE without LD.

A new era in SE is beginning. Phonics are necessary, but the problem is bigger than phonics and includes auditory processing. Teacher training institutions must train for all areas and train teachers to know that children learn differently. Attention must be paid to preschool ages to catch problems early. The goal of public education is to teach all children. Children should not be taught in separate learning centers outside public education.

Susan Warner, parent and school board member, Penn Harris Madison School Corporation, stated that Ms. Cook Lurvey's 69% figure for learning disabled SE students having average or above average intelligence may be high and is skewed by those children of exceptionally high ability.

Her child took six years to learn to read, a process which required learning the difference between phonics and phonemic awareness (the processing of auditory information). Various programs were tried at great personal expense until a successful method was found. The question is, what happens to children with parents who cannot provide this private instruction?

Her school district advocates early intervention and will provide a variety of programs for grades K-3. It tests all kindergarten children to find who is at risk for phonemic awareness problems. The school board will support these programs and hopes that the state will provide funding.

Scarlet Cramer, parent, Zionsville, Indiana, related experiences with her grade 3 child who did not progress in school. After leaving school and working with a tutor, the child was at grade level in four months. She often felt negated by the school professionals and believes that her child would still have reading problems if she were not an aggressive parent.

Debbie Squires, kindergarten teacher, Centerville, Indiana, stated that we are all responsible to teach our children. Last year, she used a phonemic awareness program in the classroom that uses all senses and benefitted every child. It was easy to use, required

15 minutes per day, involved the entire class at one time, required no book fees, and cost only a small price per student. She received teacher training in the program through a \$400 grant and received training in Indianapolis.

Chairman Clark stated that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on October 7, 1999, in Room 125 of the State House. Members should review the materials they have received this summer, look for recommendations and solutions, and come to the meeting prepared to offer ideas for legislative drafts.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.